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At the Origin of the Speaking Being: The Relationship Between Gaston Bachelard and Paul Ricœur

The invitation to further explore the relationship between Bachelard and Ricœur for this issue of *Bachelard Studies* was based on the fact that a form of rapprochement between the two philosophers had already been illuminatingly analyzed in a number of recent studies. By inviting contributors to deepen the confrontation, the call for papers suggested a wide range of possible directions: particular attention could be given to aspects of Bachelard's philosophy that cannot be integrated into Ricœur's philosophical discourse; one could assess the applicability of each philosopher's theses across various domains within the interdisciplinary field; one might also show how Ricœur draws on Bachelard, but likewise how Ricœurian concepts make it possible to clarify Bachelard's thought more precisely – or, conversely, to betray it. It was also possible to compare the differences in attitude between the two thinkers to identify potential points of divergence between them. Finally, these relationships could be situated within a broader philosophical network, highlighting the original contributions of both thinkers to several fundamental ethical, aesthetic, or ontological problems also raised by other contemporaries such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Mircea Eliade, Henri Corbin, and Gilbert Durand.

An editorial event, however, has modified the tenor of the initial proposal. In addition to Jean-Luc Amalric's *Paul Ricœur, l'imagination vive*, which demonstrates the central character of imagination in Ricœur's philosophy of action, and Jean-Philippe Pierron's *Les puissances de l'imagination*, which seeks to articulate the poetic relation to the world together with the faculty of practical possibility, one must now add the publication of Ricœur's major course on imagination delivered in Chicago in 1975: *L'imagination. Cours à l'Université de Chicago (1975)* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2024).

In this extensive course of nineteen lectures, following a fundamental conceptual distinction between, on the one hand, reproductive imagination conceived as a "picture" of a reality already given and, on the other hand, productive imagination conceived as "fiction," the analysis of the place of imagination in the Western philosophical tradition culminates in a new theory of imagination as fiction. This theory grants a privileged place to Bachelard, whom Ricœur mentions in two of his lectures, the fifteenth and the sixteenth.

The reference to Bachelard in this decisive course clearly testifies to Ricœur's debt to him. Indeed, when Ricœur moves from the analysis of traditional philosophical theories of imagination – which, with the notable exception of Kant, have largely remained theories of reproductive imagination – to his own theorization of productive imagination as fiction, he turns to Bachelard as the indispensable contemporary thinker who succeeded in thematizing this specific productivity. Two crucial elements, entirely absent from all other philosophies of reproductive imagination, are then brought to the fore: on the one hand, the thesis that the creativity of imagination finds its origin in language rather than in perception; and, on the other hand, the place granted by Bachelard's *Poetics*, within this linguistic perspective, to the idea of emergent meaning, the power of novelty, and the subject's coming-into-itself.

One can thus understand why such a publication will have notable effects on the reception of both authors and will inevitably generate a new perspective on the confrontation between Bachelard and Ricœur. Until now, whether in discussing one of the three spheres of the symbol in *The Symbolism of Evil*, or in mentioning a certain iconic residue of the image in *The Rule of Metaphor*, or again in underscoring the pivotal role of imagination in the transition from the reading of the text to action (see "Imagination in Discourse and in Action" in *From Text to Action*), Ricœur had employed Bachelardian concepts in his own works in a relatively allusive manner. It must therefore be acknowledged that *L'imagination* introduces at least two new elements into this picture. The first is the far more comprehensive formalization of a theory of productive imagination, brilliantly conceptualized; the second is Ricœur's interpretation, in light of his theory of fiction, of what should be retained from Bachelard for a coherent philosophy of productive imagination.

It is therefore a fact that the publication of Ricœur's course on imagination, by reshaping the interpretation of the relationship between the two philosophers in accordance with Ricœur's own account of that relationship, produces considerable effects of meaning. Not only has it become more difficult to appeal to the enigmatic – and possibly problematic – character of Ricœur's few allusions to Bachelard in the works published during his lifetime, but it has also become more delicate to explore their confrontation from a Bachelardian standpoint. For, since Ricœur himself both draws upon and interprets Bachelard, the analysis of points of convergence or divergence between them now appears largely determined by what Ricœur himself has said about it.

For my part, I would add that the significant effect often produced by Ricœur's "reading," owing to the particular hermeneutical relation he establishes with other philosophies, seems here to be amplified. While appropriating certain major Bachelardian concepts that he deemed indispensable for the elaboration of his own theory, and while at the same time distancing himself – through his theory of metaphor – from Bachelard's materialism, Ricœur did not produce a systematic hermeneutics of Bachelard's text. Nor did he seek to conceptualize his disagreement in light of the overall logic of Bachelard's thought.

Consequently, Ricœur's reading of Bachelard, while giving new impetus to the latter's theses on the poetic, appears incomplete: it is neither a reprise of

Bachelard nor a frontal opposition to his discursive framework. In short, it is a reading that seeks to be neither that of a disciple – however unfaithful – nor that of a direct adversary.

By situating their texts within the historical moment following the publication of the course on imagination, the contributors to this thematic issue have inevitably had to contend with this effect of reading. The articles gathered here have, overall, recognized this difficulty and sought to negotiate the shift by offering illuminating contributions on different ways of deepening the confrontation without merely yielding to that effect. Whether by showing – through a thorough knowledge of Ricœur's texts – how he distances himself from Bachelard by abandoning his own theory of the symbol; by demonstrating why Ricœur's debt is not fully explained if one confines oneself to his theory of metaphor without addressing the ontological nature of the image; by affirming that an ethics of imagination – still to be meditated – was already at work in *Air and Dreams* before the concept of narrative identity was formalized; by taking both philosophers at their word and reflecting on their respective concrete relations to existence; by confronting their particular phenomenological methods; or finally, by showing that in literary studies Ricœur cannot be applied without Bachelard – it seems to me that the texts assembled here continue the work of philosophically problematizing productive imagination. They do so while acknowledging the conceptual event represented by Ricœur's philosophy yet also pointing to the ideational excesses that Bachelard might impose upon it. Such is the fertility of critical work in philosophy: far from adhering to a merely chronological continuity, it also listens to the virtues of anachronism, to pendular movements, and to the tension-laden aspects of thought.

In this regard, the rich and lively interview that Olivier Abel kindly granted me especially for this issue appears to confirm that vigor, vivacity, faith in poetic imagination, and enthusiasm for creative language are precisely the elements that Ricœur admired in Bachelard – so much so that he sought to integrate their achievements into his own philosophy. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Olivier Abel for this friendly exchange. He is a privileged witness to Ricœur's relationship with Bachelard, since Ricœur entrusted him with the task of exploring the phenomenological potential of Bachelard's theses – whose force he himself was attempting to understand. Readers of the Bachelard–Ricœur pairing thus participate in this movement of appropriating Bachelard's philosophy of the life of language, tending toward the search for convergence between the direct ontology of poetic imagination and the second-order ontology of fiction.

It is therefore under the auspices of a positive reading of the relationship between Bachelard and Ricœur that we speak today of productive imagination.

I would like to conclude this presentation with a personal note. What I have described as a certain amplification of reading effects attributable to Ricœur's interpretation of Bachelard in his course on imagination also makes it more difficult, as I suggested, to pursue the internal coherence of Bachelard's own thought. A tendency to understand the relationship between the two philosophers as a historical progression in the order of philosophical conceptuality discourages those who might be inclined to formulate pertinent Bachelardian objections to Ricœur's the-

ses on imagination. In other words, the figure of Bachelard as pioneer – supported by his incomparable lyricism – also fosters a certain ambiguity as to whether his overall philosophical project is conceptually complete or incomplete.

Yet the unresolved problem posed by the semantic definition of metaphor at the end of the sixth study of *The Rule of Metaphor*, to which several contributors here draw attention, seems to me a clear symptom of what remains to be thought in the confrontation between Bachelard and Ricœur. In that passage, by yielding to the charm of an intuitive mode of thought – insofar as he concedes to Bachelard the truth of his ontological intuitions about poetic language – Ricœur lays down the weapons of deductive reasoning and hermeneutical argumentation, leaving unresolved the question of the iconic residue of the poetic image. It seems to me that this way of surpassing the problem, which I would describe as non-dialectical, rather than being transformed into silence about Bachelard, deserves to be considered in its full visibility and significance. What does it say, indeed? It is as though the concepts of image, imagination, poetic novelty, the origin of the speaking being, and the emergence of meaning were themselves referred to a paradoxical condition: that of remaining, after all, a poetic inspiration for a philosopher committed and devoted to a high degree of conceptual rigor.

This idea may well invite us – alongside the remarkable work already accomplished – to consider the philosophical relevance of what, thanks to Ricœur, we know he did not wish to conceptualize.

The articles in this thematic issue are organized as follows:

In the first article of this issue, Jean-Luc Amalric seeks to show how the 2024 publication of Ricœur's *Course on Imagination* leads to a reassessment of the relationship between Ricœur's philosophy of imagination and that of Bachelard. In this course – contemporary with *The Rule of Metaphor* (which Jean-Luc Amalric translated into French after editing it in English in collaboration with George Taylor) – Ricœur continues, on the one hand, to acknowledge his debt to Bachelard, as he had done in *The Symbolism of Evil*: he sees in Bachelard's *Poetics* what opens the way toward thinking creative imagination as a dimension of language rather than as a trace of perception. On the other hand, however, he moves from hermeneutics of symbols to hermeneutics of texts, a shift that leads him to develop a critical stance toward Bachelard's approach to imagination. Because he now conceives the poetic image as metaphor – that is, as heuristic fiction – rather than as symbol, Ricœur establishes a fundamental analogy between scientific imagination and poetic imagination, one that stands in direct opposition to Bachelard's insistence on the separation of poetry and science.

Beyond this disagreement, Jean-Luc Amalric nevertheless concludes by emphasizing the profound convergence between the two thinkers in their analysis of the ontological power of poetic imagination. Ricœur and Bachelard both conceive creative imagination as an increase of being and an augmentation of reality, and they understand it as a dynamic power that, in its constitutive relation to willing, regenerates, transforms, and relaunches human action. Beyond the differences separating Bachelard's ontology of the poetic from Ricœur's ontology of fiction, the central thesis of the article thus consists in showing that these two philoso-

phies of imagination both point toward an ontology of being as act, which itself presupposes the primacy of act over representation. It is not enough, in this sense, to think about the creativity of imagination from within language by rejecting the ontological primacy of perception; insofar as it illuminates and nourishes our action, this creativity must also be placed at the very root of action itself.

Rodolphe Calin's article reflects on a precise philosophical problem: the relationship between imagination and reality, approached through the question of realism of the image. Bachelard and Ricœur share the same concern to free imagination from any form of realism in order to think it as productive imagination; this leads both to distinguish imagination from perception and to define the image as a linguistic production. Yet one must also trace this issue back to Ricœur's disagreement with Sartre regarding the latter's conception of the unreal. For Sartre, the unreal is conceived as an absent real; as such, it does not truly call existing reality into question, and his theory of imagination thus remains, fundamentally, a theory of reproductive imagination. By contrast, Ricœur's critique of Sartre helps us better understand, in Bachelard, imagination as a continuous trajectory from the real to the surreal. As Calin writes, "the unreal truly breaks with the realism of perception only if it adheres sufficiently to the real to change it, to transform it." Turning then to the theory of metaphorical predication, Calin underscores the parallel Ricœur draws with Kantian schematism: just as the schema, for Kant, is a method for producing images – for supplying images to a concept – without itself being an image, so metaphorical predication is a method for supplying sensory images to the inchoate concept that results from metaphorical predication. Yet this formulation, while fitting the concept of imagination as fiction, does not entirely resolve the problem raised at the end of the sixth study of *The Rule of Metaphor*: namely, whether the image, for Ricœur, is ultimately a being of language or a being of the psyche. Is the metaphor of one comparable to the image of the other? The author suggests that one must turn to Bachelard's materialism to discern possible ontological convergences and divergences between the two philosophers.

For Luz Ascarate, the course on imagination delivered by Ricœur at the University of Chicago – fundamentally inspired by Bachelard, in her view – is nevertheless guided by Ricœur's desire to push the achievements of the concept of imagination further through a critical discussion of phenomenological method. The major difference between Bachelard and Ricœur, she argues, concerns their divergent conceptions of the acts of speaking and analyzing. For Ricœur, a continuity between science and poetry becomes possible through a hermeneutical method grounded in a certain ontology of fiction. For Bachelard, by contrast, poetry cannot be analyzed; it can only be spoken poetically. Although Ricœur sides with Bachelard against Sartre, he nonetheless validates a phenomenological ontology of fiction epistemologically, poetically, and ontologically. If phenomenology's distinctive feature is to situate consciousness in the present as an increase of awareness, then it is around Bachelard's idea of the novelty of the poetic image – and more precisely its anchoring in the present of novelty – that one can interpret what Ricœur retains from Bachelard and what he owes to him.

For Marco Franceschina, one must begin from well-known theses: whereas Bachelard privileges contemplative reverie – that is, the immediate presence of being through the mediation of natural elements, thereby promoting an ontological rootedness in the world – Ricœur places imagination at the service of narrative and ethical mediation, making it an instrument for orienting human action. Moreover, Bachelard would not have elaborated a philosophical theory of linguistic imagination in a conceptual and systematic form, whereas Ricœur does so in *The Rule of Metaphor*, and above all in *L'imagination*. The author thus advances the hypothesis that the concreteness of metaphor, even in the later Bachelard, is also an intuitive process and not solely a cognitive one, since *The Poetics of Space* speaks both of resonance and of archetypes, the latter leading to a poetic experience determined by a “sharing of being” made possible by fundamental imaginative and material structures. These theses, which Ricœur would consider insufficient to account for the cognitive character of metaphor, lead him to define it as categorical transfer and as the immediate act of perceiving resemblance – without which the phenomenon of resonance would remain unintelligible. Yet new problems then arise concerning the conditions of possibility for the intersubjective production of metaphorical referentiality. By articulating Black’s semantic approach with Schön’s reception aesthetics, Franceschina seeks to show that the emergence of metaphorical meaning is untranslatable into literal terms: as Ricœur argues in *L'imagination*, there is no rule for metaphorical creation, since it depends upon interpretive work. If the idea of metaphor as a communicative act rewrites the Bachelardian theme of resonance in epistemological terms, one must nonetheless acknowledge a certain disagreement between the two philosophers. Bachelard resolves the problem of poetic communication through the archetype as giver of meaning to primordial experiences, whereas for Ricœur the same problem can receive only an epistemological answer based on intersubjective agreement concerning the interpretation of a metaphorical statement, leaving open the question of the epistemological conditions of a hermeneutics of metaphor.

Maria Gallego-Ortiz addresses the problem of an ethics of imagination in Bachelard and Ricœur – an ethics that might lie midway between a purely rational ethics, such as Kant’s moral law, and a theory of sentiments such as Hume’s. Since poetic imagination is not merely a tool of knowledge but primarily a mode of human life, one may ask to what extent imaginative ethics might constitute an aesthetic endeavor aimed at configuring our lives. Does Bachelard not affirm in *Air and Dreams* that images organize themselves along a vertical axis and become symbols of ethical life? If imagination provides images for the dynamic schema of heroism, and if poetic reverie constitutes an awareness of the dynamism of images, then imagination prepares us for action by allowing us to discover new meanings in the surrounding world – particularly through what the author calls a phenomenology of Novalis: I dream the world; therefore, the world is as I dream it. The article then revisits Ricœur’s fundamentals. He conceives the ethical dimension through a hermeneutics of narrative identity that grants fiction an ontological dimension, with the aim of broadening Bachelard’s phenomenology of imagination. To schematize metaphorical predication by enabling the emergence of new meanings is, above all, to ground the process by which new existential possibilities are generated.

The article by Erica Martinelli Munhoz and Gustavo Marçon Puppim has the merit of concretely raising the question of the relationship between Bachelard and Ricœur with regard to their shared reference to the literary field in the broad sense. Their analysis naturally focuses on productive imagination insofar as it concretely produces images and metaphors. Assessing the practical effectiveness of Bachelard's and Ricœur's philosophical theses for literary studies, particularly concerning poetic activity, the authors undertake a threefold dialectical analysis: what Bachelard brings to literary studies; what Ricœur brings to literary studies; and what can be said about their relationship within the literary field, given what each says about poetic activity. Through his theory of material imagination, Bachelard offers specific tools for approaching texts without recourse to literary history, whereas Ricœur, by situating literary reading within a historical horizon, provides conceptual keys for an ethics of poetic activity. The analysis thus explores the conditions for a methodology that respects the potentialities of poetic language while not ignoring the contradictions inherent in the autonomy of both the discipline and literature itself. The ultimate aim is to propose a concrete practice, within literary studies, of the philosophical relationship between Bachelard and Ricœur.

A shift in perspective occurs with the article by Jean-Philippe Pierron. Rather than analyzing how Ricœur extends, interprets, or diverges from Bachelard, the author begins from the observation of a stylistic difference between the two thinkers and asks how such a difference behaves when confronted with concrete existential stakes and experiences of suffering. Can one identify common ideas between the anthropology of the capable human being and the phenomenology of reverie, which nevertheless seems to unsettle critical hermeneutics? How can one consider together, on the one hand, the hermeneutics of the "long route," and on the other, the direct ontology of the image, whose incandescent core risks absorbing everything – from the subject's reflective capacities to its power of initiative?

The first part of the article offers a stimulating contrastive analysis of their respective themes of imagination: objectification in poems and theorems for one, objectification in narratives and actions for the other; joy of dreaming for Bachelard, practical possibility for Ricœur; pathology of the irrational that prevents "surrealizing" for Bachelard, or temptation of the unreal that hinders practical possibility for Ricœur.

The second part asks what it means to philosophize in the ordeal of mourning, when the self wounded by the death of the other gives rise to the reverie of an image as *pharmakon* – that is, as an attempt to inhabit loss. One may then underscore the importance of Bachelardian melancholy as an existential stake and evaluate the place accorded to literature or to pictorial images. Speaking of his portrait by Simon Segal, Bachelard affirms: "The language of the painter, this language without words, is not without the power of semantization, of organization and structuration. It attests that before speaking there is feeling." One can thus better understand the place of tragic wisdom and practical wisdom in the work of mourning as Ricœur conceives it. For unlike a meditation on grief within an ontology of soli-

tude, Ricœur seeks a certain conceptual distance to bend the slope of melancholy. Pierron ultimately proposes to displace the stakes of this opposition: it is not, he argues, a confrontation between a materialist and a spiritualist, but rather a particular way of interrogating imagination concerning the singularity of human time.

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